

A Sunday in South Dade

by Old Dad Stevenson

To Ellen  
With compliments of the  
author

On Sunday morning, sweets for breakfast are traditional with us.

Ellen, Sally and Susan march out of their bed rooms and grunt at me in spite <sup>even though</sup> of the fact that I have been up for an hour and have driven 5 miles to get blueberry tarts for them. On this particular morning, it was raining and I humped over my coffee so the fumes would penetrate to my brain and make the day a little brighter. Minger our Siamese cat was ~~all fluffy~~ a big ball with no feet as he watched the raindrops spattering off a puddle on the patio. Choco, our burmese cat couldn't take any of it <sup>so he</sup> ~~and~~ was ~~lying with~~ curled up on his back with his feet and ~~his~~ chin in the air.

The girls burrowed through the Sunday paper, found the funnies and griped about who could read them first. The loser stomped over to the television set and jerked the button <sup>on</sup> while I narrated a ~~short~~ story about a daddy ~~that had~~ who turned on his daughters like a mad dog when they ~~had~~ bugged him before his had time to reach coffee ~~reached~~ his brain. It was all lost in the clatter of the raindrops so I hunched over my coffee again and stared ~~at the~~ into space ~~along~~ with Minger.

Mother came in, stared at the rain, picked up the coffee I had poured for <sup>her,</sup> found what was left of the papers, <sup>and</sup> ~~her, and then~~ shuffled back to the bedroom to hibernate. The girls rotated between the funny papers and the television and the blueberry tarts and when my coffee was gone I pried myself from the chair and went into the garage to find some task to take my mind off the weather. This was our day to hop in the car and go someplace, but the chance <sup>at</sup> ~~to do that~~ today ~~didn't~~ seemed ~~as dim~~ as dim as the weather.

I fixed the pump that filtered the pool, straightened the workbench, and got together some odds and ends for the trash barrel when the mistress of the house came in. "Look," she ~~said~~ said. "The tomatoes and ~~oranges~~ are ready <sup>near</sup> ~~by~~ Homestead." At certain times of the year, after the growers have



picked their fields, they put notices in the paper and the public ~~is~~  
<sup>can</sup>  
~~to~~ go and pick their own for a fraction of the regular cost. This is the  
 signal for an army of men, women and children to take up their bags and form  
 into long, loose convoys of cars that head southward from Miami to invade the  
 fields in search of vine ripened goodies. When we do this, we usually make  
 picking and  
 a day of it ~~and~~ seeking out and buying anything else that looks reasonable  
 and fresh. "That's nice," I said "but my hip boots have ~~xx~~ holes in them!"  
 "It's clearing up", she said. "You and the eels can go and I can study for  
 my exam tomorrow". I looked outside, and sure enough, it was clearing,  
 I called the girls.

Ellen wanted to bring her friend Kim, so she got on the phone while the  
 other two griped that they couldn't bring their friends. I told them they  
 didn't have any friends to bring and probably ~~would~~ never would if they didn't  
 stop acting like beasts of the jungle. "Your sister is almost a teenager," I said,  
 "why don't you act like her". ~~And~~ Susan pointed out that 8 was  
~~that was~~  
 a difficult age ~~compounded by~~ and that her troubles were compounded by  
 Sally's extra two years which made her act like she was a princess, or something.  
 I pointed out that an 8 year old skull and ~~xx~~ a 10 year old skull were about  
 the same thickness and that when two such skulls were brought sharply together  
 that the pain would be equally transmitted through ~~xx~~ both. Ellen said  
 that Kim could go, so the search for shoes, combs, ~~and~~ toothbrushes and bags *began*.  
~~got into full swing.~~



and began  
 I lined up my ragged little army the count down on the necessities that must accompany any safari into the hinterlands. The usual things were missing, beginning with the smiles. Collecting the everyday ordinary things always turned out like a search for the nest of a trumpeter swan or a passenger pigeon. The missing articles ~~xxx~~ were usually faked in some way with statements like "yea, it's over there" or it's already in the car. These hollow allusions ~~xxxxxx~~ were meaningless to a battle hardened veteran like me, however, so the search continued until a missing shoe and a ~~xxx~~ were found and duly presented for verification. With a final sweep of the arm and a painful grimace ~~xx~~ I ordered my troupe into the car and we headed south.

We picked up Kim who was supposed to be finishing her breakfast while we were getting ready and I was astonished when she was waiting for us in her driveway. Things were looking up. We had no sooner cleared the residential area where Kim lived when we saw a girl on a horse up ahead of us alongside the road. Somebody ordered me to slow down and as we passed the horse and rider the comments came crisp and unmistakable. "Is that her horse?". "Yea, that's her horse". "How come she has a horse?". "Yea, she's too fat to ride a poor horse". "I hope she falls off". "I hope the horse throws her off". The comments were natural. If ~~xxx~~ there's anything that crew worshiped, it was horses. I was so sick of hearing about horses ~~xx~~ that I couldn't even watch westerns on TV anymore. They never could become obsessed with something practical like tropical fish or even flowers, so I had to endure pictures, etc. etc. and worst ~~never ending~~ of all comments about horses. Everytime we passed one on the road, ~~it was like~~ I thought they were going to faint. I couldn't imagine what they would be like when they became teenagers and changed their affection to long hair and blazing music.

We finally passed out of sight of ~~from~~ the huge beast and its "fat" rider and I gritted my teeth and resolved to divert their attention if I saw anymore



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coming up. We passed a dense thicket of trees and bushes where he used to pick grapefruit that was wild and showed down because there was a tomato field next to it. But the tomatoes were not ripe, so we sped up again and continued farther along the road. As we drove along, I pointed out the various kinds of crops that filled the fields on either side of the road. As I rattled out pole beans, squash, spinach, cabbage I got ~~unified~~ <sup>a chorus of</sup> "yechs", "icks" and "ughs". It seemed that they hated ~~everything that was~~ <sup>most of what was</sup> alive and edible and only the ~~fruit trees~~ oranges, avocados and grapefruits met the test. I pitied the poor farmers if they were growing the wrong crops ~~and~~ <sup>or</sup> if they depended on the juvenile market for a livelihood.

We turned east on Chrome Avenue and soon passed a ~~fruit~~ stand that was overflowing like a cornucopia with ~~bursting~~ <sup>luscious</sup> gold, red and green fruits. The girls were all eyes and stomachs and the clamour began to slow down and buy. I had to think fast, so I pointed out that prices there were high and besides, there was no sport to picking fruits and vegetables out of a basket. There was something ~~rewarding~~, I said about going forth upon the earth and gleaning nature's <sup>own</sup> bounteous harvest with one's bare hands. The girls said that they ~~were~~ were hungry, so I told them to shut up and drove on.

We finally spotted a number of cars parked along the road and a sign that said "tomatoes, U-pick". The sign also said "5¢ a pound", ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> that looked good to me. The farmers ~~were~~ were very nice, and ~~took us~~ pointed us to the part of the field where the tomatoes were best, so we jounced along a dirt road until we were opposite the spot. The girls burst out of the old station wagon like a covey of quail, and I had to ~~screech~~ bellow at the top of my lungs to get them to come back to get their bags. When I got them together again, I instructed them in the fine points of tomato picking. "Now you pick the green ones", I said, "because if we pick all red ones they will all be ripe at the same time and then they will rot before we can eat them all". I knew I had



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made a mistake the moment I said it. "Dad," they pleaded, "we want to pick the red ones". "All right", I said, "this is what we'll do". I looked around to see if there were any farmers ~~around~~ <sup>nearby</sup> and lowered my voice. "I'll tell you what we'll do", I said. "When you find a nice, juicy ripe one with no worm holes in it, eat it". Feeling benevolent, but knowing I wasn't really fooling anyone, I continued. "You can go ahead and put in one with a little red on it every now and then", I said. "Try to put in a few green ones ~~now and then~~ <sup>too, will you?"</sup>. ~~With you~~ Before I could say anything else, they were ~~speeding off~~ <sup>paper</sup> bounding ~~off~~ across the field like a bunch of jackrabbits with bags flying in the wind. jackrabbits at the annual spring ~~hop~~ hop.

~~They followed my instructions~~

Everything went along pretty well for a while. The bags were neglected, of course, while they slurped and gobbled up ~~everything in sight~~ all of the eligible tomatoes in sight. There were the usual small problems such as Sally catching Susan in her row and Ellen catching Sally in her row and once I heard the inevitable screech as one of them bit a worm in half. At one point, I made a head count and found myself one girl short. I thought this would happen, so I immediately turned ~~back~~ away from the tomato field ~~and~~ <sup>in time to see</sup> Susan sneaking into a nearby tangerine orchard. "Just chasing a lizard, Dad", she grinned, but I noticed that she ~~wasn't~~ kept well out of reach as she zipped back into the tomato field.

The tomatoes were plentiful, so we stopped <sup>picking</sup> to examine the catch to make sure we had enough ~~of them~~ of them in various stages of ripeness. In spite of the attention to eating and lack of attention to ~~work~~ the task at hand, we had done reasonable well, so we folded the tops of our bags and walked back to one of the roadways that cut through the field. I remembered the old days when I used to work on a farm back in Wilmington Delaware, so I staged a dramatic ~~exhibition~~ <sup>demonstration</sup> that left the girls speechless. ~~I picked up a~~



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I carefully chose the biggest, ripest tomato I could find and slowly squashed it together with both hands. The girls' eyes were popping as I explained that in spite of the awful way it looked, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ washing your hands with a ripe tomato would make them as clean and soft as the best beauty soap ever made. I ~~ground~~<sup>ground</sup> the mess together through my fingers as though ~~it was a wonder~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ I was using soap and then flicked off the pieces of seed and skin that remained. "Now watch when it dries", I said. It didn't dry very fast, and I had a few anxious moments while I wondered if maybe Florida tomatoes were different from Delaware tomatoes, and after all, it had been quite ~~xxxx~~ a few years since I tried that trick and maybe my memory was faulty. But the difference was in the high Florida humidity and although it was slow, my hands finally began to dry and "presto", old Dad was right all the time. This was more <sup>each</sup> than enough for the girls and they raced to find the proper hand-washing variety of tomato. There ~~was something revolting about~~ <sup>must have been something</sup> "icky" about the business, though, <sup>they all</sup> because ~~each of them~~ "squinched up" their faces as they ground the ripe fruits through their fingers. They were losing confidence fast, so I told them to wave their arms around and their hands would dry faster. This they did and the doubtful little faces became brighter and brighter. Their hands soon felt so great, and smooth and neat that Sally started to look around for a tomato with ~~which~~ which to wash her feet. I told her that nobody had ever tried to do that, and besides we had to ~~go find xxxxxxxx~~ leave because we still had to find ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ a grove where we could buy some oranges. Sally said she would ~~not~~ forget the idea if I would let them climb ~~up~~ a big pile of crates that ~~were~~<sup>was</sup> piled in the middle of the field. This seemed like an easy out, so I grunted for them to hurry up. ~~xxxxxxx~~ They were soon perched on the top of the pile like ~~xx~~ starlings on a telephone wire. Naturally just sitting there wasn't good enough, so I had to liven it up for them by throwing tomatoes for



each one of them to catch. As anyone could have predicted, they soon began to throw them back a little harder and faster ~~the~~ each time they caught one. There's something primitive and irresistible about throwing tomatoes, so I must admit that I was speeding up things a little, too. I tried a whole handful at once, since I had the supply cornered. ~~This was too much of a challenge for them~~ It became obvious to them that they could throw tomatoes a lot faster if they had more tomatoes, so they broke ranks and tumbled down off the boxes. I was soon hopelessly outgunned, so I picked up my bag and ~~tried to do some broken field running~~ tried to remember how they taught me to do broken field running back during the war days. I should have known better.

On the way back to the car we saw a big chicken coop so we stopped to investigate. It was a commercial egg-laying operation and there must have been hundreds of chickens running around in the huge shed. We saw the feeding troughs, the stalls where the hens laid the eggs, the lights that would make them lay all night long, and a rat hole. We discussed the rat problem, how they ate the grain and stole the eggs and possibly might even kill a chicken now and then. Susan became very ~~interested about~~ worried about the chickens so she hunted around and found some stones and plugged up the hole where the rats were getting in through the screen.

Before we got to the car, we passed a bunch of ~~thick~~ high, thick weeds with clusters of seeds on their tops. There was a flock of finches ~~hanging~~ sitting on the stems ~~upside down~~ chattering away as they pulled at the seeds. Some of the birds were hanging upside down as they cracked the seeds with their beaks. ~~and I~~ I explained that this was natural ~~as the finches often~~ <sup>a</sup> way for some finches to feed ~~as they often had to~~ as the stems often bent under their weight and ~~it was~~ ~~easy for them to~~ they didn't have to keep their balance in this position. The girls were glad to see that the finches had plenty to eat because we all had plenty of tomatoes for us to eat.

A nice couple, that we thought were Mexicans ~~wik~~ weighed the tomatoes



for us and we drove off to ~~find~~ look for the orange grove that had been advertided in the paper. We made a wrong turn on Silver Palm Drive and went east/  
instead of west. As we drove along looking for a place to turn around Susan spied a big ~~box~~ rubber tree and begged me to stop sh she could climb it. Ellen, Kim and Sally joined in and put on the pressure. I was ~~still arguing~~ <sup>winning the argument</sup> when I found a place to make my turn and then I had to pass the darned tree again and I began losing ground. I saw some boxes along the road with some jars of honey on them, so I promised that we would come back after we found the oranges and get some honey and climb the tree. This calmed them down, so I got a chance ~~to think whether I was still headed in the right direction or not.~~

to unscramble my thinking and make sure we were still headed in the right direction.

We crossed Chrome Avenue again, bumped across ~~the~~ <sup>some</sup> railroad tracks and found our orchard a half a mile farther on. There was a ~~nicely kept~~ <sup>neatly kept</sup> driveway between lush rows of trees loaded with ~~bright oranges~~ big juicy looking oranges. At the end of it we found a small stand with bags of oranges on it and a whole truckload of them to one side. We ~~hopped~~ <sup>hopped</sup> out of our station wagon and two huge sheppard dogs got up and walked very purposfully over toward us. I froze in my tracks wondering whether I should try to make it back to the car or to climb an orange tree. I figured if they started to eat one of the kids ~~it up the tree.~~ I might have time to make ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ The girls, of course, took one look at the brutes and stormed up to them like they were Santa Clause and his reindeers. After they ~~stroked every hair on their bodies and scratched their ears,~~ <sup>those huge</sup> the little finished rubbing down the monsters and massaging them behind the ears they shrieked ~~for~~ <sup>a t</sup> me to come meet their new friends. I could have killed them. I knew that if ~~the~~ their new "friends" smelled the fear that I felt for them they would immediately attack and render me <sup>To the Bone</sup> like a school of pirhannas. The girls were looking at me, the dogs were looking at me, the



<sup>too</sup>  
~~also~~ looking at me, I felt like my feet were stuck in quick sand. I learned at that moment, however, that there are other fates worse than death in its most ugly form. Something was expected of me. The whole world expected it, ~~and~~ I had to do it, and I did. I took one step, and then another and then another. This was that moment of truth that all men must meet sometime ~~no other when~~ in some place when there is something to be done ~~and~~ simply because it must be done and for no other reason. I felt like ~~as~~ a stiff legged puppet whose legs were being manipulated from another planet. The inevitable happened, of course. I ran into a lashing mass of tongues that would have melted a hole through the side of a battleship. Sheppards are such slobs.

The oranges were wonderful and I bought a whole box of them. The man was of the girls a great big orange very kind and gave each ~~girl a great big orange~~ just for herself. I thought this was strictly great, but I noticed that the little "gluts" were eyeing every orange on every tree until we again hit the open road and got out of the grove. <sup>1</sup> The girls began eating oranges like they ~~were~~ were peanuts and there was a We decided to continue on toward the west to see where the road went. It didn't go far. The macadam soon gave out and we found ourselves beating out a tattoo along its gravel extension. The country changed and instead of the dense green orange groves, avocado ~~trees~~ and palm trees there was ~~only~~ high waving grass that extended to the horizon. We were in the everglades. That was enough for me, but Sally proclaimed that as long as we were there we might as well hunt for ~~ex~~ "sliders". I found an intersection where gravel roads came together and Susan <sup>2</sup> and climbed up on the roof of the wagon to look for canals ~~where~~ where the turtles might be while Miss Slider Hunter sat ~~in~~ the inside and ate oranges. I didn't really care too much about "sliders" ~~and~~ so I stood on the car roof and enjoyed my view of the "glades". But Susan ruined ~~was enjoying my view of the "glades", but Susan had to ruin everything~~ everything by lying on ~~her~~ her stomach and poking fun at the girls in the car, upside down through the rear window. I directed her to climb down and we retraced our steps eastward this time away from the barrenness of the waving <sup>the</sup> grass and the haunts of "sliders".

copy of this story by the author



The trip back to the greenery we had left was eventful. We had fun watching for the orange peels that we had tossed out the window and we stopped to watch a mother horse with her colt. The mother kept pawing at the ground ~~expectantly~~ to get at the grass underneath a ~~small~~ palm frond that had fallen off one of the trees. As she scraped the branch, it would flip up in the air and the colt would shy away from it as though it were a snake.

We saw some large avocados on a stand alongside the road and stopped to look them over. A sign said to "blow your horn" ~~for service~~ for service, so we tooted until a girl came ~~to~~ running up. We picked three nice full fruits and were on our way. The girls ~~were~~ were quiet for sometime after that. Finally, one of them spoke for the group. "Gee" she said, "I wish I lived on a farm like that with all those trees to climb and everything". This was Susan's cue. "Don't forget that rubber tree, Daddy", she said. How could I ever.

: On the way to the rubber tree, we saw a ~~peacock~~ peacock crossing the road. Sally wanted to stop and pull some feathers out of its tail. I explained that the bird probably belonged to someone in the vicinity and that they would probably not be happy about having a peacock without a tail. Besides, I explained, the peacock itself might take exception to such an overt act and peacocks were big birds and could probably get <sup>right</sup> ~~right~~ nasty about the whole thing.

This seemed logical enough, so we ~~continued~~ proceeded onward in search of a rubber tree and a honey stand. When the large tree hove into view, all four girls wanted to climb it immediately, but I pointed out that it was on the property of the farmer who owned the honey stand and that we should get his permission before we went aloft.

We went up to the door of a house nestled among the trees behind the boxes with the ~~honey~~ jars of honey sitting on them. We had a wonderful chat with a lovely lady who <sup>told</sup> ~~told~~ us ~~about the honey~~ a little about the honey and then the old gentleman who ran the orchard came out of the house. He was a most



genial grandfatherly type with a pith helmet and a wide friendly smile that the girls identified with immediately. The girls asked him about some cats they had seen near the house, so he took us over to see ~~him~~ them. The girls petted them and he told us how ~~they~~ his cats kept getting hit by cars because he lived <sup>so</sup> close to the road. The girls told him <sup>how</sup> lucky he was to live on a farm with ~~chickens~~ chickens and all that, so he took us ~~around~~ in back of his house where there was an old hen with ~~xx~~ five small downey chicks. One of the cats was crouched on ~~xx~~ the ground eyeing the chicks and the grower told us that the cat didn't have a chance of catching th chicks because the old hen always had her eye on him.

We went back to the honey stand and the grower got a bunch of spoons from the house and let us taste each of the different kinds he had. He explained about ~~each~~ <sup>the</sup> wild or cultivated flowers that each kind of honey came from, We picked out a jar of honey that ~~was~~ we all liked and then the grower let us taste pieces of several different kinds of grapefruits that he raised. We slushed them down and decided that we liked the white kind the best. Then he cut up several kinds of oranges and we ~~xxx~~ thoughtfully sampled each of them. We rejected a "tangelo" that was <sup>orange</sup> across between an ~~orange~~ and a tangerine.

no para. He showed us a giant avocado that weighed about three pounds and told us about some of the difficulties he had in shipping fruit up north.

The girls washed their hands off ~~xxx~~ <sup>under</sup> a hose and then migrated to a set of swings alongside the house. I had a nice discussion with the old gentleman and then it was time to go, so I called the kids. We were just piling into the car when <sup>Ellen</sup> ~~Sally~~ remembered the rubber tree. The grower lit up like a Christmas tree. "Your girls climb", he ~~said~~ said. "Come on, and I'll tell you about my tree". He led us down the road, <sup>keeping a weathered eye out for approaching cars</sup> protecting us ~~from the cars~~ like a mother hen. He told us a story about his son who had many years ago climbed the old tree and had gotten stuck high among its branches. Being a good father



and a tree climber in his own right, he had shinnied the heights and had rescued his son from certain starvation within the folds of the leafy giant. He told us that he once had donated it to a new park that was being developed, but even at a tender age, the tree had been too big to haul away.

History notwithstanding, the girls attacked the old monarch ~~with a~~<sup>leafy</sup> like a pack of squirrels that had been too long earthbound. In no time,, they were scooting along branches high above the ground. They kept challenging me to find them among the foliage and I must admit it was difficult to tell the apes from the tree. I was having a nice discussion with the grower when I looked down at my feet and saw an owl pellet. This was something that I was sure the girls would "dig", so I told them to come down and see something real neat. This was fine with Susan as she had to go to the bathroom anyway, so they all took the cue and shinnied back to earth.

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